

Title: Identifying Risk & Responding

Age/Grade: 11th & 12th grade

Length: 80 minutes

In this lesson, students will:

- Understand the impact that the internet has on all of our lives in both positive and negative ways.
- Know how their behavior changes when they are online as opposed to offline, and how this can foster risky decision-making.
- Build a “toolbox” that will improve youth online decision-making in stressful online situations.

Overview:

At this age, most youth are spending more time online than they are sleeping each day - something that was only magnified over the pandemic and continues as more and more of daily life is conducted online. While this time spent online is not automatically bad or unhealthy, what youth are doing with this time and the decisions they make dictate their day-to-day experience in a number of ways. At the threshold of adulthood, juniors and seniors face a period of time where the risks they face online may change or shift, along with the consequences they may face for their online actions. With these changes, also comes more responsibility to be a good digital citizen and work to take actions that make the internet a better place for themselves and others. The current lesson will focus on how we open ourselves up to risk when online, how the impact of our online decision-making changes as we do, and how we might be able to create a personalized “toolbox” of ways to cope with online situations like cyberbullying, cyberhate, sexting, and other possible risks.

This lesson seeks to address to following questions:

- What are the positives and negatives that the internet offers me day-to-day?
- What risks are we taking online and how are we reacting to those presented to us?
- How does online risk change as you become an adult?
- What is my role online in keeping myself and others safe?
- What skills can I improve to ensure my experience online remains positive and safe?

Materials:

- Big paper pad
- Stickers
- Printed out scenarios packets
- Writing utensils
- 2-4 colors of dry-erase marker

Introduction – Activity

10-minutes

At this step, we want to establish a rapport with the students over their relationship with social media and the internet. For this activity we will create large pages with T charts that have critical questions about our relationship with social media. These pages will be put up around the room. Student will be given stickers and will be asked to walk around the room and put a sticker on the side of the chart that corresponds to how they feel.

Questions to ask:

- Do you feel that the internet has a more positive or negative impact on your life?
- Do you feel like social media impacts your mental health (yes/no)?
- How equipped are you to properly respond to the risks you face online (very prepared/somewhat prepared/somewhat unprepared/very unprepared)?
- As upperclassmen do you feel like you face more or less risk than in the past?
- As upperclassmen do you feel like you face more serious or less serious consequences for your online actions?

After the students have returned to their seats, take some time to review each chart and see how the students felt. Ask if any students would like to share their thoughts. Use the discussion resulting from this activity to lead into a conversation about online risk, how they change as we become adults, and how being online can change how we act, or make risks seem less substantial.

Evolving Risks and Online Disinhibition

3-minutes

For this discussion, we want to acknowledge that the risks you face change across the life course, and that we need to be aware of risks we encounter online and develop the tools necessary to respond to them in healthy and responsible ways. At their age, people are expecting them to act like adults, meaning that they have more responsibility as digital citizens, and can face more serious consequences for their online actions. Use this time to explain that being online can change how we think and feel and open up the opportunity for risk. Introduce the concept of online disinhibition.

Risks We Face Activity & Debrief

10-minutes

Open up a discussion by asking for examples of how risk may actually exist in the student's online lives. Begin by asking the students what the number 1 risk is that worries them day-to-day online. As students list examples, write them on the board. Once you have the examples students provide

listed on the board begin to use different colors to “group” them into various classifications of risk (emotion vs. physical vs. informational vs. belief/idea). Use the examples students give to lead into a discussion about how risk change over time and are different from what they or others might think are the big risks they face when online. This can also be a time to use the list that is on the board to discuss the difference between contact and content risks.

Once you have done this, follow up by posing a question to the students about whether the risks they are most commonly talked to about are the same risks they are most commonly seeing online. Often times there is a large focus on risks to personal safety when online, because these risks have more tangible consequences. However, the other forms of risks the students mention have consequences because they often attack peoples’ beliefs, ideas, and identities.

Identity Activity

7-minutes

This activity is meant to help the students start thinking about their identities, but also how the characteristics that are most important to how they perceive themselves might not align with the characteristics that most effect how they are perceived by others.

Have each person take a few minutes to answer the following questions on a handout:

- 1) Identities/characteristics that have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself.
- 2) Identities/characteristics that have the strongest effect on how others perceive you.
- 3) Identities/characteristics that have the strongest effect on how others perceive you online.

Once students are done, ask if anyone would like to share. You may want to write these on the board, so that you are able to return to these examples later. Make the point that often, certain groupings of people are often ascribed as well as self-claimed, but other social identities are personally claimed, but not often announced or easily visually ascribed. Otherwise stated, people are often sorted into categories by others based on just the things people can see from the outside.

Debrief

7-minutes

Ask the students how this misalignment might be dangerous or risky – as in the misalignment of how people view our identity vs. how we view ourselves. Discuss the use of identities and the way they can be incredibly beneficial to us, but also be used negatively online and off as well. Transition the discussion to be able “hate speech” and what it is and the impacts it can have (both for those victimized and those who are bystanders to the speech). It is not always easy to understand the impact of seeing or reading something harmful if it isn’t a direct attack against

yourself or someone you know. Ask the students what some possible consequences of these sort of online attacks/risks are. Ideally students start to generate their own consequences, but highlight a few if they are not touched on, such as: mental health impacts; causing members of vulnerable groups may feel unsafe/uncomfortable, and may be more reluctant to speak freely online; people may be misled into believing untrue things; people come to believe that hate against others and even oneself is justified in defense of their own group. This can lead into a conversation about online hate across various domains. Tell students that you are going to spend some time focusing on this particular online risk. Additional questions stemming from what hate speech is and its impact can include:

- What does hate looks like/how is it attacking people's identities (particularly online)?
- How does online hate occur in a variety of ways, from more subtle to more overt?

Identifying Hate Online

10-minutes

This activity will involve reading a list of hypothetical situations and ask students to determine whether the situations need action to be taken by the students to protect oneself or peers against it. Have them stand up and move to one side of the room if they believe they need to take action on the situation, and move to the other side of the room if they believe that action to protect from it does not need to be taken. For each hypothetical, ask students to volunteer to explain why they believe something should be done or not and what they believe the best course of actions are. Keep track of these reasons on the board.

Situations:

- A local newscaster calls women's basketball a "fake sport" and says only men's basketball is worth talking about on the news.
- A student threatens violence against his school on social media with a meme on Instagram.
- A person creates a post discussing why they don't like the current President.
- Someone posts a TikTok about how they refuse to sit by Asian students on the bus because they are worried that they will catch COVID
- Someone you follow uses a slur when singing in a reel on Instagram.
- Someone shares an article titled "10 reasons why Kanye is right about everything"
- Someone shares a post saying that Chinese food is better than Mexican food.

Once you have gone through all the situations above, have the students sit down. Use the ideas listed on the board, of why certain actions or words should be restricted or unrestricted. Explain that in the examples of when something crosses over into hate speech is if it is aggressive, incites violence, creates a hostile or unsafe space, attacks someone because of their identity, or calls for discrimination against a certain group. Discuss how hate stands apart from just voicing one's opinions, and how more subtle hate can lead to more overt hate. Explain that critically thinking

about what forms of speech are acceptable and which aren't is part of the skills needed to identify and respond to the risk of hate speech online. Part of this decision-making process can include thinking about how online hate may impact 1) victims of hate, 2) witnesses of hate, and 3) the wider community. Ask the students if they can think of how these might be different. It's important to note that hate speech often doesn't have 1 single victim and its effects are wide sweeping.

Pathway to Hate

10-minutes

Stereotypes → Prejudice → Discrimination

This would be a good time to guide students through “the pathway to hate”. Start by writing the components of the pathway to hate on the board. Ask the students if they can describe/define what stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are.

Use the examples the students may provide, or even draw on the examples from the activity the students just completed to demonstrate how hate can evolve through this pathway. While some expressions of hate are more subtle than others, we can use the pathway to understand when something might be risky online. We can think about whether a situation we come across is at one of the “stages” of the pathway to hate. Explain to the students that while not ignoring and responding to hate is important, part of acting against hate is stopping a situation before it gets to the end of the pathway. Introduce a real-world event demonstrating hate and ask the students to use what they learned about the pathway to hate to think about how the situation could have emerged. Ask the students if they can think of steps that could've led to the hate incident. Discuss with the students that there are actions that can be taken along every “stage” in the pathway to hate and the idea is to act when you can to stop the progression of something down the path. Tell the students that the next activity will help them think about ways to respond to a variety of online risks – including online hate.

Pass the Risk Activity

20-minutes

This activity is a chance to put everything discusses thus far into action and generate some ways to respond to the online risks we talked about in this lesson. Students will be broken up into four – five groups. Based on the discussions had in the day and the topics of particular interest for the students, choose from the list of scenarios built at the end of this lesson. Each group will start off with a piece of paper with scenario of an online risk (or a situation that could become risky). Each group will get a different scenario. Each group will read their scenario and come to a consensus on 1 possible way to respond to the situation. Each group will have one person write out their proposed response, and one sentence on why this was the chosen response on the paper with the

scenario. The groups will then pass their paper to another group. Each group will now have a paper with a scenario, and one proposed response and explanation. They will then read the scenario and generate a short pros and cons list regarding the proposed response from the previous group and then offer a *different or additional* possible response to the scenario. Papers will then be passed to another group, and that group will offer pros and cons for the new proposed response, and then propose another *different* response. This will repeat until all groups have seen all scenarios and the papers are back with the original groups. Each group will then discuss their scenario and possible responses will be listed on the board.

The idea here is to let them generate possible responses to online risk. The pro and con list is intended to offer one way of guiding them through the critical thinking that should be part of decisions made when online. Ultimately, they should end the activity with a repertoire of possible ways to respond to online risk, with part of the critical thinking component already done or at least kick-started.

Debrief

3-minutes

Use the variety in responses to risk provided in the last activity to discuss how online risks, their impact, and our responses to them, are all very personal. Draw attention to how various changes in circumstance can influence the risk level and the coping mechanisms available (i.e., contact versus content risk, a situation involving friend versus stranger/trusted or untrusted source, etc.) Remind students that as seen in the last activity, there isn't just one way to respond to online risk, and each way has its pros and cons. The idea is to work on building a "toolbox" of skills to help them properly evaluate and respond to risk they face online. Discuss how there are more direct versus indirect ways of responding to risk and how this is okay, not everyone may feel comfortable getting directly involved every time they spot a risk online, however just ignoring these risks is not the best response for us and the people around us. You want to challenge the students to find ways they feel comfortable responding, and to actually follow through with them when they do encounter various online risks.

Complete the lesson but explaining you will further debrief this activity to start the day on Friday, and that they will participate in a problem-solving activity then. They will be challenged to identify a problem facing their community/school, work together to develop the idea for the solution that can be implemented and led by them, and design an implementation plan that will effect their fellow students and ultimately impact that problem they identified.

Scenarios for Passing the Risk Activity:

Scenario 1:

Avery is the type of person that is *always* on their phone. You can always count on them for a quick response, or to instantly like your posts. Avery has a habit of pulling their phone out and hopping on Instagram or TikTok whenever they are feeling bored, constantly refreshing their feed. Avery starts noticing that everyone they follow seems to have a better, more active life than they do, with everyone constantly going on trips, buying new clothes, or doing fun things with their friends every day. Avery felt like they needed to keep up and started spending a lot of time on making the perfect photos or videos to post every day. Avery starts compulsively checking their posts for the number of likes and comments, and comparing these numbers to some of the people they follow. Avery starts feeling very frustrated that no matter what they post, they can't seem to live up to their friends and other people they follow online. Avery starts to question their appearance and even their personality, constantly thinking about what is wrong with them and why they don't seem to have as many friends or get the same number of likes or comments on their posts as other people. What could Avery do to help manage these feelings?

Scenario 2:

Tatum was listening to a podcast and heard that a large number of high school students were not getting into college despite having a good GPA, SAT scores, and plenty of extracurriculars. The guest on the podcast said that the reason for this was because universities "are trying to scrub white-ness from their campuses". Tatum, having recently submitted college applications got really mad at this and decided to look it up online. Tatum found a few research articles that seemed to disagree with the podcast, but the podcast also said that research refuses to talk about this "because they know what they'll find". Tatum later found a couple of random news articles and a ton of posts online complaining about minorities stealing spots at major universities all over the US. Still angry, Tatum decided to ignore the articles that said what was in the podcast wasn't true, and instead shared the podcast with a caption saying "imagine being a senior in high school and having to learn the lesson that universities are trying to keep you out because of who you are #goodbyewhiteculture"? You come across this post, what is your course of action?

Scenario 3:

Alex gets a random DM telling them to follow an account on Instagram. Curious, Alex goes to the account to check it out, and realizes it's private. Not thinking anything of it, Alex follows the account to see what it's about. Once Alex's follow is accepted, they go check out the account and realizes that whoever is running the account is someone at their school and that they are posting rumors about people. Not only are they posting rumors, but every post has a picture of the person

the rumor is supposedly about. Alex realizes that a lot of the things posted by this account are rumors that they've heard come up in conversations people are having at school. Alex wasn't exactly a fan of spreading rumors but decided not to unfollow the account because they didn't want to miss something good, and more importantly they wanted to be able to see if the person ever makes a post about them. What is another way Alex could respond to this situation?

Scenario 4:

Emma views herself as being friends with almost everyone at the school and doesn't think of herself to have any enemies. She does well in school, does some extracurricular activities, and she also coaches youth soccer. In the times she is not in school or doing one of the other activities, she spends a lot of her time online – usually around 6-8 hours a day. While spending time online, she often tries to keep up with everything happening in the world with news and updates, however the more she saw it, the more upset it was making her for the pain others were feeling. The more upsetting news she looked up, the more it continued to show up on her feeds (videos of people being affected by a wildfire; stories of a new virus that was found impacting teens; protests of recent injustices). This started to severely impact Emma's mood – feeling more anxious, nervous, and stressed out – and it caused her to hang out with friends less and be shorter tempered with her classmates. How can Emma cope with what is happening and her feelings?